

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE JOINT MISSION TO CHERETI AND DOLLO - 12 FEBRUARY 1997

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On 12 February 1997, a one-day joint mission comprising of DPPC, WFP, SCF (UK), CIDA, UNDP-EUE and a representative of the Ethiopian Somali National Regional State (ESNRS), visited the administrative centres of Chereti and Doollo weredas of Afdher and Liban zones in Southwestern Ethiopia. This mission represents the latest in a series of assessments undertaken in the vulnerable lowland nomadic areas supporting primarily nomadic Somali and Borana population groups.

The following highlights the major findings of the joint mission:

1. Wereda and zonal administration officials reported that most areas in Afdher and Liban zones are currently threatened by a rapidly spreading drought, following insufficient rains across the rangelands in the last short season of *deyr* (October-December). The current shortage of pasture and water has been aggravated by an influx of a large number of drought-affected nomads from the Kenyan Mandhera district in north-east Kenya as well as from Gedo and Bakol regions in south-west Somalia. Attracted by the availability of pasture and water on the Ethiopian side, better security and prospects of access to external assistance, the immigrant nomads have exerted additional pressure on already-limited pastoral resources, thereby plunging the affected areas into a critical situation which could develop into a serious famine if the main rainy season (*'gu*), which is normally expected in April, is delayed. Since available pasture and water are fast diminishing due to the increased number of livestock, there is concern that weak cattle may perish, not even to survive the current dry season (*jiilaal*) unless unusual early rains at the beginning of March alleviate the deteriorating situation. The condition of livestock owned by the local nomads is better than those of the incoming nomads.
2. Drought-displaced nomads from south-west Somalia started to migrate to Dollo and Filu weredas in late 1996, but available pasture and surface water in these areas quickly became exhausted, resulting in an unusual movement of both local and guest nomads to neighbouring Afdher zone. General scarcity of pasture and the early concentration of herds along the banks of the rivers (the dry season grazing region in an average year) is said to have induced further migrations to wet-season grazing areas of the interior where water wells and pasture are generally known to be better.
3. Because of increasing encroachment of agriculture into the rangelands of Afdher and Liban, a sedentarization process has taken place, accelerated by the arrival of a large number of returnees in 1991/92. Cattle husbandry has increased significantly and is therefore replacing the traditional husbandry of the sturdy camel on which the livelihood of nomads ultimately depends during times of crisis. The overstocking of cattle in a fragile nomadic environment has already caused problems of overgrazing and is

accelerating the deterioration of the rangelands. It also undermines the capacity of traditional animal husbandry of the semi-arid lowlands to cope with recurrent drought as cultivation expands into previously-defined favourable dry season grazing areas.

4. In general, Afdher and Liban zones are relatively well-off in terms of nomad access to critical water sources during the precarious long dry season of *jiilaal*, as the main river systems found in the Somali State transverse both zones. The Weib river, which usually dries up at the height of *jiilaal* and contained very little water at the time of the visit, and the perennial rivers of Webi Shabelle and Gennale all traverse through Afdher zone; the Dawa river and the main subsidiary of Gennale, both of which trace the border between Afdher and Liban zones, form the main water systems found in Liban zone. During the dry season water flowing in these rivers or immediately below the surface of their dry beds is sufficient to sustain the lives of both pastoralists and agro-pastoralists. This does not mean that all areas of these zones have sufficient water in the dry season, as some settled localities, for instance Filtu town, which is located at a distance from the river and other sources providing permanent water, already faces acute shortages and now depends on water delivered by tankers from Negelle town, some 125 kms to the north-west. Nevertheless, water is not considered the main problem affecting the majority of rural populations in these relatively well-watered zones.
5. As elsewhere in the region, the survival and well-being of the rural population in both zones has already been affected by difficult access to adequate food. A widening disparity between livestock and grain prices is primarily responsible for the existing food insecurity. The deteriorating condition of livestock has also depressed animal trade, and there is hardly any market for weakened stocks. In effect, nomads cannot sell animals to obtain the cash necessary for purchasing the grains that form an important element of their diet over the dry season when pastoral products (milk, etc.) become scarce.
6. Insufficient *deyr* rains also affected agro-pastoralists practicing a mixed economy of animal husbandry and rain-fed agriculture. Lack of moisture resulted in the complete failure of crops planted in both Liban and Afdher zones during the short *deyr* season. The high price of staples, maize and sorghum, in the cultivating settlements indicates an absence of local grain in the markets. Many agro-pastoralists are said to have already exhausted their reserve from the main season and are therefore hungry, facing imminent starvation and malnutrition.
7. Irrigated agriculture and flood-recession agriculture are also practiced along the banks of the perennial rivers. These forms of farming are certainly more reliable than the rain-dependent and widely practiced dry farming; however, they are limited in scope and do not have a significant impact on the food deficit. For example, flood-recession agriculture is carried out along rivers banks and supports a limited number of farming families; irrigated agriculture by private producers is also limited as it is hindered by a shortage of irrigation pumps and lack of spare parts for the maintenance of existing pumps.
8. The still-continuing influx of displaced persons from Somalia has negatively affected the already precarious food situation in urban centres of the affected zones. The Doollo and Suftu administrations have reported approximately 40,000 displaced persons in the two areas; however, these reports could not be verified by the mission. Dislodged by a combination of factors including drought, internal strife and general instability affecting border areas, the new influx has placed an additional strain on the already hungry urban centres, rendering it difficult to provide adequate support. The situation of the displaced in Doollo and Suftu is said to have also been affected by wider rural economic problems and lack of labour in the towns. According to Doollo wereda and zonal administrators, ten displaced persons in Doollo were hospitalized for malnutrition last month. Four of the

malnourished patients have died of hunger. This implies that the unassisted displaced population have now reached a critical state and will not be able to survive without external assistance before the next rainy season, when the situation is expected to improve. The present situation of the displaced certainly warrants further monitoring and immediate response from the regional, central authorities in collaboration with humanitarian organizations in the area.

9. As the *jiilaal* dry season progresses, the situation will rapidly deteriorate and the needy population in the urban centres of Afdher and Liban zones could be joined by drought-affected nomads from adjacent areas. This will increase further competition among the destitute populations for the already limited low-income occupations available in the urban centres.

The views expressed in this report are solely those of the author and have not been endorsed by other members of the assessment mission.

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